



Braving the Wilderness

SUGGESTED MEDITATION

The “Ahhh!” Exercise

The following exercise is the suggested format for meditation during study group meetings. Members can take turns leading each week. Be bold in breaking the sound barrier for the “Abbs!” After an ample period of silence, close with a chime, a pleasant ring tone, or a simple “...and so it is, Amen.”

Pull your shoulders up to your ears and drop them. Settle into the seat — let it take all your weight. Take a slow, full breath, hold it for a few moments, then let out a deep sigh, as if breathing out through all your pores, letting go of everything, all burdens and decisions, stress and distress: *Abbb!*

Do this a few times.

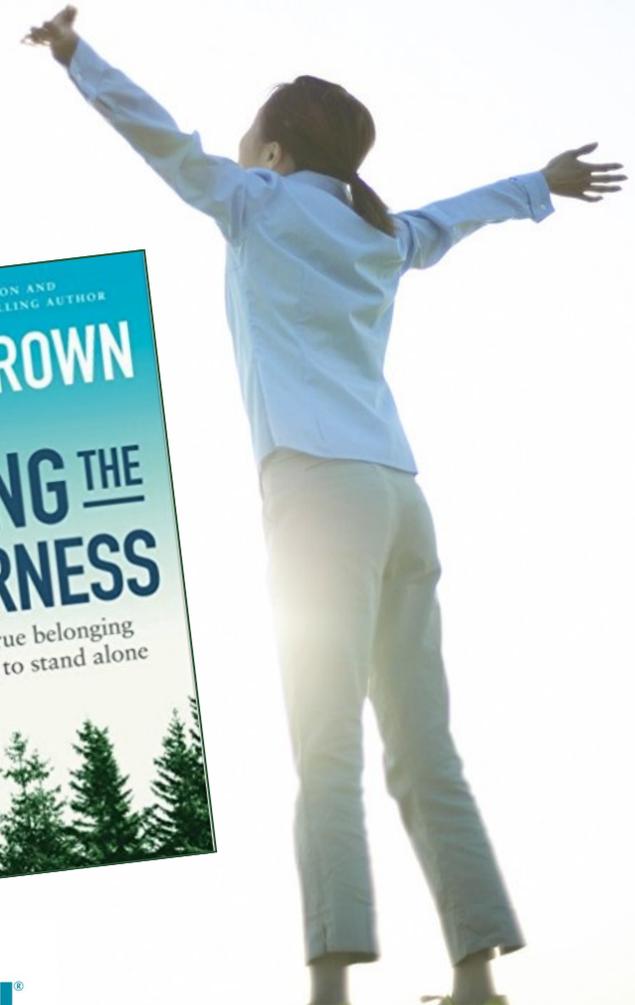
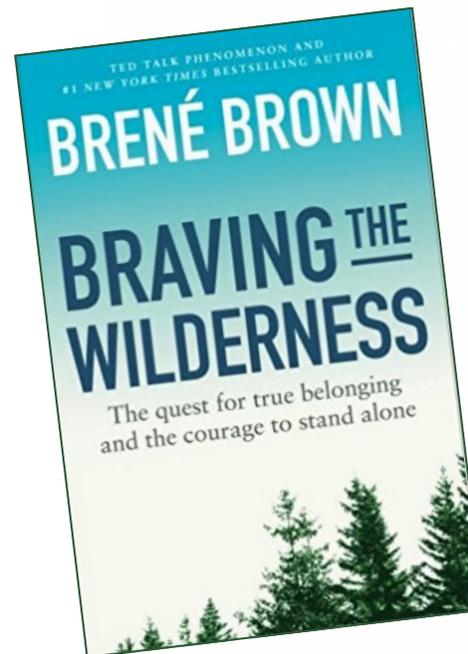
Then just sit. That’s all. Don’t try to concentrate on anything or feel a certain way. Don’t resist thoughts or pursue them; as they arise, just let them go. Simply continue to *be* — just relax and remain aware, naturally open, as you already are.

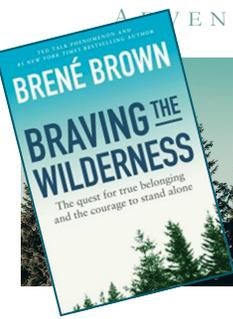
Simply *be*, now. In the silence...

Adventures In Spirituality

Study Guide

January 14 – Feb. 16, 2017





Braving the Wilderness

Acknowledgements

THIS GUIDE WAS CREATED
AS A JOYFUL COLLABORATION BY:

*Rev. Kurt Condra
Anne Edwards
Priscilla Florence
Olga LaLuz
June Lash*

PROOFREADING

Anne Edwards



3434 Central St.,
Evanston, IL 60201
847-864-8977
www.unityns.org

3. Talk about a time you shared your opinions with a community and experienced pushback from people you liked. Did your relationship with these people change?
4. Describe a time when you chose not to acknowledge what was happening around you because you felt you had no power to make a difference. What could you have done differently?
5. How can we advocate for our deeply held beliefs in a civil and respectful way?
6. When have you exercised your vulnerability muscle which allowed you to stay open rather than attack and defend?

MEDITATION

Follow the *Abbb!* exercise reproduced on the back cover.

CLOSING ROUND

Share one idea or insight from tonight's session that you want to incorporate into your consciousness.

THIS WEEK'S PRACTICE

Think of someone or something you hold outside your heart. Write a letter of resolution taking responsibility for your part in the separation and inquiring about their perspective. Extra credit: Send the letter, or make a call aimed at resolution.

CLOSING PRAYER

*The light of God surrounds us. The love of God enfolds us.
The power of God protects us. The presence of God watches over us.
Wherever we are, God is, And all is well. Amen.*

Braving the Wilderness

WEEK FIVE: Chapter 7

Strong Back. Soft Front. Wild Heart.

OPENING PRAYER

Centered in peace, we acknowledge this divine appointment. Each of us is a unique, unrepeatable expression of the spirit of Wisdom. Led by the ever-present impulse that guides and inspires, we are a blessing to the all.

REVIEW OF GROUND RULES ~ See page 5.

CHECK-IN ROUND

Each member shares whatever is most alive in his/her heart/mind: Insights from material, blessings from the day, reflections from last week's practice.

HOUSEKEEPING

Review Commitment and Home Book Study Ground Rules.

AFFIRMATION

The presence of God within is a limitless source of strength, vulnerability and courage. I belong to myself. I understand braving the wilderness is the most powerful call to courage I can make.

DISCUSSION

1. Think of a time where you found yourself in a place when you had to find the courage to stand alone, to say what you believed, and do what you felt was right, despite feelings of criticism and fear. How did standing up for yourself and your beliefs feel? What were the results of your courage?
2. Describe a time where you found yourself in a place when you didn't allow others to silence you, a time when you navigated a difficult situation with grace, grief, and strength. What did you learn about yourself?

Enrichment Circle Meeting Agenda

*Opening Prayer
Review of Ground Rules
Check-in Round
Weekly Affirmation
Discussion Questions
Meditation
Closing Round
Suggested Practice
Prayer of Protection*

Chart of Our Course

Week One ~ Chapters 1, 2 & 3

THE QUEST FOR TRUE BELONGING.

Week Two ~ Chapter 4

PEOPLE ARE HARD TO HATE CLOSE UP. MOVE IN.

Week Three ~ Chapter 5

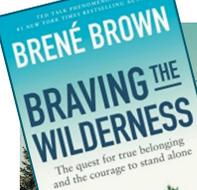
SPEAK TRUTH TO B.S. BE CIVIL.

Week Four ~ Chapter 6

HOLD HANDS. WITH STRANGERS.

Week Five ~ Chapter 7

STRONG BACK. SOFT FRONT. WILD HEART.



Braving the Wilderness

The Commitment

Commitment transforms promise into reality. It is fueled by words that speak boldly of our intentions, and actions which speak louder than words. It is making time, where there is none. It is following through. It transforms our lives and our world. It is the triumph of integrity over skepticism.

- I commit to this process of spiritual exploration, of fulfilling my soul's longing to understand and express the divine to the best of my ability, with my thoughts, words and actions.
- I go to my heart, and invite other circle members to do the same, because I believe in the connecting power of God that dwells in the one heart of which we are all a part.
- I celebrate the greatness in myself and in you. Our lives are filled with infinite possibilities woven together in Oneness.
- I love and accept you just the way you are, and I respect your right to be different and to think differently than I do.
- I am open to sharing my thoughts, feelings and beliefs authentically in our exploration of Truth. I love you and myself enough to share my personal experiences openly and to listen lovingly and intently to the truth you choose to share.
- I choose words of kindness, encouragement, appreciation and gratitude to build a strong foundation of mutual support as together we claim the perfect expression of our individual spiritual natures.

Signature

Date

3. In attending a church (or spiritual center), what do you feel you gain in that environment instead of connecting to spiritual principles solely by yourself?
4. Do you engage in social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram? If so, have you found this practice to cultivate a sense of belonging, to be warm, nourishing, and informative? Or have you ever found it to be hurtful, isolating, or discouraging? What pros and cons do you find in social media as we seek more meaning and connection in our lives?
5. Brown says every act of courage involves vulnerability and emotional exposure. What emotional risks of vulnerability and uncertainty have you taken in times when you acted bravely?

MEDITATION

Follow the *Abhh!* exercise reproduced on the back cover .

CLOSING ROUND

Share one idea or insight from tonight's session that you want to incorporate into your consciousness.

THIS WEEK'S PRACTICE

Each day, initiate a conversation with a stranger: someone next to you on the train, in an elevator, or at the grocery store. Journal about your *inner* dialogue before, during and after the experience.

CLOSING PRAYER

*The light of God surrounds us. The love of God enfolds us.
The power of God protects us. The presence of God watches over us.
Wherever we are, God is, And all is well. Amen.*

Braving the Wilderness

WEEK FOUR: Chapter 6

Hold Hands. With Strangers.

OPENING PRAYER

Gathering in gratitude, we celebrate this moment. Freed from fear, we experience the wonder of the world around and within us. The veil of separation lifts as illumination continues to have its way within our minds and our collective consciousness.

REVIEW OF GROUND RULES ~ See page 5.

CHECK-IN ROUND

Each member shares whatever is most alive in his/her heart/mind: Insights from material, blessings from the day, reflections from last week's practice.

HOUSEKEEPING

Review Commitment and Home Book Study Ground Rules.

AFFIRMATION

I courageously share with others, even strangers. I am ever unfolding in my awareness that, as spiritual beings, we are connected as ONE.

DISCUSSION

1. Think of any personal experiences you've had in a crowd where an "inextricable human connection" transcended any divisions or anger between opposing sets of opinions or beliefs?
2. What experiences have you had among groups of people, even strangers, where you felt comforted by not having to bear, alone, either joy or sorrow, and where even your vulnerability or tears were in heartfelt unison with a crowd?

The Ground Rules

Ground rules help create a safe and healthy environment for the group. It is important that the group reviews these ground rules and reaches consensus prior to discussions.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Everything shared by group members is confidential. What is shared here, stays here.

COMPASSION

Group members relate to each other with unconditional, compassionate acceptance. Judgmental comments, even unspoken judgmental thoughts, threaten the group process.

TRUTH & INTEGRITY

Group members are encouraged and supported by one another honestly and authentically to be who they are. Speaking the truth involves risk and can only occur safely in a compassionate environment.

RESPECT

Group members show respect for each other and the group by not interrupting others, arriving on time, and allowing everyone to participate.

CONFLICT

Whenever people come together and speak truthfully, the potential for hurt feelings, misunderstanding and conflict exists. If such a situation arises, group members agree to address it within the group process, or one-on-one with the facilitator. Unresolved conflict is toxic to the whole group and not just to the parties directly involved.

GROUP PROCESS

This process is for our own personal and spiritual growth, not group therapy. When sharing, group members are asked to use "I" statements and avoid trying to fix or solve.

PARTICIPATION

Group members agree to be prepared by reading the required chapters and to participate in discussion and group activities; however, each person has the right to ask to sit out or modify his or her participation.

Braving the Wilderness

WEEK ONE: Chapters 1, 2 & 3

The Quest for True Belonging

OPENING PRAYER

Holy Spirit, bless this gathering as we share our thoughts, insights and a-ha's. We now open our hearts and minds that we might deepen our understanding of God, ourselves and one another, and remember that the same divinity in each of us is in everyone, everywhere.

REVIEW OF GROUND RULES ~ See page 5.

CHECK-IN ROUND

Each member shares whatever is most alive in his/her heart/mind: Insights from material, blessings from the day, reflections from Sunday's lesson.

HOUSEKEEPING

Sign and review Commitment to Home Book Study Ground Rules.

AFFIRMATION

I am free: I belong no place. I belong every place. My reward is great.

DISCUSSION

1. Brown states we sort ourselves into like-minded groups geographically, politically, and spiritually. Can you relate to this "sorting"? Is it increasing or decreasing in your life?
2. Share an experience where you felt it's an "us versus them" culture with friends, family or colleagues.
3. The author says we must be brave (authentic and vulnerable) and go into the wilderness, intentionally being with others who are different from us. What would stop you? What "different" groups would you consider joining?

5. Given that "The amount of energy needed to refute BS is an order of magnitude bigger than to produce it," how can we remain open to doing the work? What makes it worth the effort for you?
6. Imagine a controversial issue arising in a group where you feel a sense of "true belonging." What steps might be taken to support civility? (Civility is claiming and caring for one's identity, needs, and beliefs without degrading someone else's in the process.)
7. What behaviors/issues push your own BS buttons or get in the way of your ability to be civil?

MEDITATION

Follow the *Abbb!* exercise reproduced on the back cover.

CLOSING ROUND

Share one idea or insight from tonight's session that you want to incorporate into your consciousness.

THIS WEEK'S PRACTICE

Pause each morning and set an intention to approach any hint of BS with generosity, empathy and curiosity. Each evening, assess your success in honoring your truest self while treating others respectfully.

CLOSING PRAYER

*The light of God surrounds us. The love of God enfolds us.
The power of God protects us. The presence of God watches over us.
Wherever we are, God is, And all is well. Amen.*

Braving the Wilderness

WEEK THREE: Chapters 5

Speak Truth to B.S. Be Civil.

OPENING PRAYER

Divine power blesses this gathering. We join together in our unity of purpose unfolding all that is ours to see, feel, hear and know. Together, we say “yes” to the divine invitation to expand our conscious awareness and practice of bravery, courage and vulnerability.

REVIEW OF GROUND RULES ~ See page 5.

CHECK-IN ROUND

Each member shares whatever is most alive in his/her heart/mind: Insights from material, blessings from the day, reflections from last week’s practice.

HOUSEKEEPING

Review Commitment and Home Book Study Ground Rules.

AFFIRMATION

Centered in God, I’m curious about differing and opposing points view.

DISCUSSION

1. What do you make of the distinction drawn between lying, (defiance of truth), and BS (dismissal of truth).
2. What cues can help identify when a discussion is turning into a BS argument?
3. Share a recent experience of being confronted with a BS argument. Share a time when you resorted to using BS.
4. What insights can you glean for how to better deal with “you’re with us or against us,” “either/or” conversations?

4. When you are lonely, do you tend to withdraw or to reach out? What practices have you used to reach out for connection?
5. In a group setting with differing opinions and perhaps conflict, how could you apply the concept of being BRAVE, creating spiritual connection, so communication is open, safe, and authentic? What would that look like for you?

MEDITATION

Follow the *Abbb!* exercise reproduced on the back cover.

CLOSING ROUND

Share one idea or insight from tonight’s session that you want to incorporate into your consciousness.

THIS WEEK’S PRACTICE

Each day, open yourself to an experience you normally wouldn’t consider: NPR listener? Tune in to Fox News? Sit-Com fan? Watch a sci-fi thriller. Visit “the other side” of town? Order a dish you normally wouldn’t try? Be mindful of any judgments or resistance that arises, and be ready to share about it during next week’s check-in.

CLOSING PRAYER

*The light of God surrounds us. The love of God enfolds us.
The power of God protects us. The presence of God watches over us.
Wherever we are, God is, And all is well. Amen.*

Braving the Wilderness

WEEK TWO: Chapter 4

People Are Hard to Hate Close Up. Move In.

OPENING PRAYER

The infinite Spirit of Life, Love and Wisdom is everywhere present. As we tune into this truth, our gathering is alive with inspiration, awake with spiritual insights and grounded in principle.

REVIEW OF GROUND RULES ~ See page 5.

CHECK-IN ROUND

Each member shares whatever is most alive in his/her heart/mind: Insights from material, blessings from the day, reflections from last week's practice.

HOUSEKEEPING

Review Commitment and Home Book Study Ground Rules.

AFFIRMATION

Immersed in a field of courage and bravery, I am willing to see and be seen. My world is made new as I live freely, love abundantly, and expand mindfully.

DISCUSSION

1. Think of a time when you have stopped a conversation by saying (or thinking), "Let's just agree to disagree." Brown suggests a better approach is to keep the conversation going. Looking ahead, what might you say to keep the connection alive in similar conversations in the future?.
2. Why is it dehumanizing to think, "I like this person. S/he is an exception to the rest of their "group," i.e. African American, Jewish, Democrat, Republican etc.?"

3. How does our unresolved past color decisions about the future? How do such influences impact your personal life? As a citizen? Family member? In spiritual community?
4. Describe a time when you found deeper understanding in the midst of disagreement. What did you say or do to navigate differences in opinion?
5. How do we push through our vulnerabilities and stay civil?

MEDITATION

Follow the *Abbb!* exercise reproduced on the back cover.

CLOSING ROUND

Share one idea or insight from tonight's session that you want to incorporate into your consciousness.

THIS WEEK'S PRACTICE

This week, try to greet everyone you encounter: on the street, in the store, even telemarketers. If in person, try to make eye contact, smile, and say, "Hi," "Hello," "How are you?" Notice if you have more or less resistance to greeting some individuals. Notice the feelings or assumptions that arise when they respond or when they don't.

CLOSING PRAYER

The light of God surrounds us. The love of God enfolds us. The power of God protects us. The presence of God watches over us. Wherever we are, God is, And all is well. Amen.